

the flood. I also hope that it will record the tremendous efforts made by many North Dakotans to survive and to rise to the occasion with heroic feats.

Now that a few months have passed since the waters have subsided, it is time to reflect back on some of the many heroes—people that stepped up when their community needed them—whose efforts shined despite the rising waters.

In a disaster the extreme importance of a communication system is pivotal in fighting back and preserving the safety of those in the area. Today, I would like to recognize the efforts of several US West Communications employees who worked tirelessly to maintain critical telephone service to the Grand Forks area throughout the flooding.

On April 19, 1997 a crew of nine central office technicians barricaded themselves into the US West building in the heart of Grand Forks to keep the communication systems of the area up and running during the disaster. The extensive preventive work that the US West workers completed to get ready for the flooding would now be tested as their building was surrounded by 4 feet of water, and sat just one block away from a raging fire. The work of these men and women sustained phone service to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Federal Aviation Administration, State and local emergency workers, and so many others in the flooded region.

To give you an idea of the challenges facing these workers, they labored night and day to keep the wires dry as 26 inches of water threatened basement cables. Sustained by the food, clothing, and cots delivered via boat by the National Guard, these folks stayed on as the area was evacuated by all other people. In light of this adversity—and armed with high-volume pumps, drying machines, and sandbags—these courageous people sustained service to 50,000 area customers and hundreds of emergency workers.

I would like to recognize these heroes by name for their dedicated service is appreciated by me and many others touched by their efforts. The members of the initial emergency team were: Denny Braaten, Linda Potucek, Larry McNamara, Bob Schrader, Dan Kaiser, Dale Andrews, Glenda Wiess, Rick Hokenson, and Lew Ellingson.

Two days later, US West reinforcements arrived to provide additional support and hard work. I would like to recognize these workers now: Don Jordan, Ray Jacobsen, Tim Kennedy, Roger Jones, Bruce Bengston, Gary Boser, Jim Falconer, Bion McNulty, Jack Olson, and Tim Rogers.

I am tremendously proud of the courage and dedicated service demonstrated by the US West employees in Grand Forks. They, along with so many others who volunteered and continue the rebuilding efforts today, exemplify the North Dakota spirit.●

LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, AND EDUCATION APPROPRIATIONS BILL

● Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill that the Senate passed yesterday provides the National Institutes of Health and other Government health initiatives with funding needed to continue their work on diseases that afflict so many millions of Americans. I am glad to see that this budget will continue to place a priority on health research and, in particular on women's health. Although we have seen many advances in women's health over the past several years, much more progress needs to be made especially on such intractable problems as breast cancer.

The key to successful breast cancer treatment is early detection. Mammography has been and will continue to be a key diagnostic tool in early detection for women in the high-risk category for breast cancer. Digital mammography is the next generation technology in mammography imaging for cancer, and it offers a number of advantages over the current film technology, including: improved image quality and diagnosis; improved lesion visualization; lower overall cost of image storage and retrieval; and increased use of tele-mammography as a means to facilitate expert consultations.

There is a second generation digital mammography technology on the drawing boards that offers the prospect not only of improving the ability of radiologists to identify lesions in the breast, but also of significantly reducing the cost of digital mammography. One such approach, a Metal-Halide technology, holds out the promise of meeting these goals. This technology has the potential to result in an imager that could be used to replace the film imagers in existing mammography machines—rather than needing to replace the entire mammography machine.

There are significant technical hurdles that must be overcome before a product of the necessary quality of resolution for mammography can be introduced. The research and development risk may be too great for private sector companies to move forward, thus making it ideal for a Government-industry partnership.

I urge the administration to consider addressing this issue in its fiscal year 1999 budget by creating a program that would focus on key technologies that could improve women's health. This new program could place particular emphasis on technologies that will make a significant difference for women, have a high likelihood of near-term commercial development, and are likely to see widespread and rapid diffusion throughout the medical community.

Mr. President, the war on breast cancer and many other diseases has not been won. In the private and public sectors, we must be creative in looking for new approaches to address and over-

come these challenges. It does little good if we make a breakthrough in the lab or corporate research facility, if we can't bring that breakthrough to market in such a way that the maximum number of people benefit. I hope the administration will give careful consideration to these kinds of new and innovative ideas in crafting its budget for the upcoming fiscal year.●

TRIBUTE TO DAN VECE, SR.

● Mr. DODD. Mr. President, within every town in the country, there are a small handful of families or individuals whose achievements and contributions to their community are so extraordinary that they become as much a part of the town's landscape as Main Street, the Court House, or City Hall. The Vece's are such a family in the town of Clinton, CT.

For decades, Vece family members have been on town boards and commissions, working on countless charity and civic events. The Vece family's contributions to town life were even honored in 1995, when the Pierson School gazebo was renamed the Vece Gazebo. But the greatest illustration of what this family meant to the vitality of this small New England shometown could be seen once a week at a local restaurant. Each Sunday from 4 to 8 p.m. for the past 16 years, a diverse group of patrons would gather at Bill's Seafood Restaurant to enjoy the music of Clinton's favorite band. The people of Clinton loved coming out and singing the songs that they all knew, but what they loved most was the band's leader—Dan Vece, Sr. What set Mr. Vece apart from other bandleaders was not the great musical skill with which he played the banjo. What made Dan Vece so special was his zest for life. That, and the fact that he was over 100 years old.

Seeing Dan Vece on stage wearing his trademark sailor's cap and picking at his 1919 Gibson banjo, served to remind countless people that life was meant to be enjoyed. He served as an inspiration to anyone who was fortunate enough to meet him. Sadly, on September 23, 1997, Dan Vece, Sr. died at the age of 101.

Dan Vece, Sr. grew up and lived in New Haven, CT until he enlisted in the Army during World War I. After being discharged from the Army, he returned to New Haven where he married his wife of 68 years, Tilly Tullo. Together they moved to Clinton in 1919, where they operated a retail plumbing store and service. In addition to his business, Mr. Vece was one of Clinton's first police officers and served as a fireman, beginning the longstanding family tradition of public service. Mr. Vece enjoyed working and didn't retire until he was 80 years old, and he continued doing odd jobs until he was 88. He played golf until he was 96, and drove a car until he was 98, transporting senior women to the grocery store. Dan Vece was involved in countless activities, but his true passion was always his music.

He had no formal musical training, but he taught himself to play most any musical instrument that he could get his hands on. His wife was a trained musician and together they formed a band with Tilly on piano and Dan on the drums. They played together at the ice shows in Clinton and all the big jobs from New Haven to New London. And after each gig, they always loved to go out dancing.

Eventually, Tilly retired from performing, but Dan carried on and fronted a band that played at restaurants and resorts along the Connecticut shoreline, various jazz festivals, nursing homes, schools, and of course Bill's Seafood Restaurant on Sunday evenings. Whenever anyone asked why he was still performing, Mr. Vece would always say that his doctor told him that music was the best medicine and he should keep on playing as long as possible.

Well, Dan Vece followed his doctor's orders, and as a result he brought happiness into the lives of countless individuals. Dan Vece, Sr.'s good humor, devotion to his community and remarkable vitality made him a beloved figure in Clinton and throughout Connecticut. He was loved and revered by all, and he will be dearly missed.●

VETERANS' BENEFITS ACT OF 1997

● Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, as the Ranking Minority Member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I am enormously pleased that the Senate is considering S. 714, as amended, a bill that would make valuable changes to a number of veterans benefits and services. In the waning days of this session, the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees were able to reach compromise on a wide range of programs and services for veterans—from programs to assist homeless veterans, to providing home loans to Native American veterans, and I urge my colleagues to give their unanimous support to this measure. It is particularly fitting that we make these improvements for veterans programs now, as Veterans Day is just a few days away.

Mr. President, because all the provisions of this measure—which I will refer to as the "compromise agreement"—are set forth in the joint explanatory statement which Senator SPECTER will place in the RECORD, I will discuss here only some of the issues which are of particular interest to me. The explanatory statement was developed in cooperation with the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs and that Committee's Chairman, BOB STUMP, will insert the same explanatory statement in the RECORD when the House considers this measure.

EXTENDING AND IMPROVING THE NATIVE AMERICAN HOUSING LOAN PILOT PROGRAM

Mr. President, section 201 of the compromise agreement will extend for four years the authority for the Native American Housing Loan Pilot Program, under section 3761, title 38, Unit-

ed States Code. This pilot program was created in 1993 to provide loans to eligible Native American veterans to purchase, build, or improve dwellings on Native American trust lands. This program is so important because commercial lenders will not finance the purchase of homes on Native American lands, as lenders cannot foreclose in the event of default. Therefore, the traditional VA loan guaranty program is not, in effect, available to Native American veterans residing on tribal lands.

This program has been very successful in financing purchases of homes by Pacific Islanders. However, it has been somewhat underutilized by other Native American populations. Therefore, this bill would also provide for enhanced outreach by VA to inform Native American veterans of the availability of this program. It further tasks VA with analyzing what is working and what could be improved in its administration of the program.

I would like to commend Senators AKAKA and CAMPBELL for their tireless advocacy on behalf of Native American veterans.

REINVENTING VA'S EEO SYSTEM

Title I of the compromise agreement will establish a new employment discrimination complaint system of the VA. This provision ensures that the employees who perform equal employment and opportunity (EEO) counseling and investigations are professional and independent by creating a new office to adjudicate complaints, separate from line management.

The Committee has had grave concerns about how VA has handled several high profile EEO complaints filed against senior staff members. Therefore, this bill also provides for VA to submit a separate report regarding complaints filed against senior level employees, based on their personal conduct. I believe it is critical that VA's actions be subject to Congressional scrutiny, in order to assure accountability.

I want to thank Senator GRAHAM for his leadership on this important issue.

SPINA BIFIDA ELIGIBILITY CLARIFIED

Mr. President, section 404 of the compromise agreement will clarify the eligibility—for compensation, health care, and educational assistance—of the children with spina bifida born to Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange. Currently, the eligibility of the child is determined by looking to the veteran father. However, under title 38 of the United States Code, a former service member who received a dishonorable discharge is generally not considered a veteran, and is therefore not eligible for veterans benefits from the VA.

It was Congress' intention to provide benefits to all Vietnam veterans' children with spina bifida. Congress did not mean to exclude the children of veterans with dishonorable discharges.

This provision will clarify the eligibility criteria to include the child with

spina bifida of a Vietnam veteran regardless of the character of his discharge. This is a minor modification in the law, but to the children who suffer from spina bifida, these benefits can make a significant difference in their lives. These benefits can improve their quality of health care, provide educational opportunities, and enhance their quality of life. It would be great injustice if these children were denied these benefits because of their father's discharge status.

MAMMOGRAPHY POLICY

Section 208 of the compromise agreement seeks to address a discrepancy between VA's stated principles and their clinical practice with respect to breast cancer programs. Though a guiding principle of the Veterans Health Administration states that "the quality of care in VHA must be demonstratively equal to, or better than, what is available in the local community," in my view, VHA's breast cancer detection policy fails to achieve community standards because it only targets women between the ages of 50 to 69.

Mr. President, it is very important that veterans have access to preventive diagnostic tests to protect their health. Because breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer in women, I look forward to receiving VA's national policy on breast cancer detection.

I thank Senator SPECTER for his leadership on this issue.

HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. President, I am pleased that the authority for the Health Professional Scholarship Program has been extended for one year. Aspiring health professionals have a strong interest in the scholarship program, and it has proven to be an effective recruitment tool for the VA in the past. Staffing analyses done within the VA have identified a need to increase the levels of nurse practitioners and physician assistants to adjust to the shift from inpatient to outpatient care, and this program is well suited to assist individuals in these career paths. We will continue to evaluate this program and look for other opportunities that will increase both recruitment and retention of health professionals in the VA.

MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY PROJECTS CONSTRUCTION AUTHORIZATION

Of the projects authorized under Title III of this bill, I am especially pleased that we have included the authorizations for projects in Northern California. I have been concerned that veterans in Northern California have not been receiving convenient VA health care services ever since the Martinez VA Medical Center was closed in 1991.

The conference agreement authorizes VA to move ahead with plans to create an accessible network of VA health care by specifically authorizing funds for upgrades and enhancements to McClellan Hospital at Mather Field in